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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PSC FUNDS TELE-HEALTH PROPOSAL

LINCOLN -- The Nebraska Public Service Commission voted September 8 to approve an order that authorized the state's Universal Service Fund to support up to \$900,000 annually for a plan to link Nebraska's hospitals and medical providers.

The Nebraska Hospital Association brought its Tele-Health network proposal to the Commission seeking Universal Service Fund support. Tele-Health will utilize eight hospitals in Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, Norfolk, North Platte, Omaha, and Scottsbluff as hubs connected with the state's other hospitals to offer voice and video hookups from one end of Nebraska to another.

At a public hearing before the Commission on September 1, the Association said specialists and medical records will be available to help Nebraskans regardless of which hospital they visit, thereby minimizing the inconvenience of travel time and expense for patients and health care professionals. The Association also envisions that Tele-Health will allow health care providers opportunities for continuing education closer to where they work than currently is possible.

Members of the Public Service Commission spoke highly of the Tele-Health plan: Commission Chair Jerry Vap of McCook said, "In providing funding for the Tele-Health Plan, the Commission recognizes the great potential for healthcare services that will benefit the entire state. Rural hospitals will have instant access to medical specialists to provide critical care quickly. This will save lives as well as bring expert healthcare to all Nebraskans."

Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln noted Nebraska's leadership in the use of universal service funds. "Once again the Commission has proven itself a national leader in the development and roll out of the statewide universal service program."

Commissioner Lowell Johnson of North Bend, a former 12-year member of the Nebraska Legislature when consideration of Tele-Health began, said, "The Tele-Health program in Nebraska is the result of over 10 years of dedicated planning and organization on the part of many entities and individuals. Nebraska is in the forefront of states utilizing information technology to benefit the health needs and concerns of everyone. I take great pride in saluting all of the persons and groups who have worked so long and so hard to complement the 'good life' in our state."

Commissioner Anne Boyle of Omaha said, "The Commission took an historic step in utilizing technology to benefit the health of Nebraskans across the state. In addition, this step has the potential to produce more cost efficiencies in providing health care in Nebraska."

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